

The Clipper Visits John DeLorenzo

By MADDIE MERRIFIELD

Life, for most octogenarians, is not filled with the kind of energy which finds them felling trees, cutting, splitting, chopping and hauling 5 cords of wood in the dead of winter. But if you come looking for John DeLorenzo of Summer St., you just might be directed to the forest on his 28-acre property and find him doing just that. John turned 81 on the first of January.

"Actually," he says modestly, "I only work out there a couple hours a day. Then I call it quits." If he's not in the woods with his chain saw, you might find him in his workshop where he creates "one-of-a-kind" pieces of furniture, representing hours of precision work on the lathe. Each unique piece is finished to professional quality. Every year he devotes the winter months to one project. He designs the furniture in his head, and using no pattern or even a rough sketch, begins with a piece of wood and ends with an original work of art.



John and Anna DeLorenzo stand by the Shaker reproduction hutch which John built for their kitchen.

John's wife, Anna, often thinks up these winter projects for John, suggesting a hutch or coffee table or some other piece she might need for their 14-room house. One of the first things John created was a 28" pepper mill, which "can stand at one end of the table and pepper everyone's plate at once!"



John's oldest brother, Tom, had started a fruit stand on Summer St. in 1920, the first stand between Boston and the Cape. Summer St., which later became Rte. 53, was just a "cart track" back then. John remembers when the road was finally tarred. His father would get up early in the morning and bake bread for the construction workers. Though the road was going in, they had no car. There had been a Model T in the family back in Quincy, but when they moved to Duxbury, it ended up in the back field until it fell apart. "How I wish we had it now," says John.

The family always had chickens, and eventually they became part of the family business. At one time, they had as many as 30,000 broilers and roasters. Then in 1945, John and Anna bought a dozen one-day-old turkey poults. They kept them in a box in their kitchen, warmed by a light. Nine of the 12 survived, and it was the beginning of the first turkey farm in the area. In 6 months, the hens weighed 14-15 lbs. and the toms, 24-25 lbs. When they first started raising turkeys, it took 5-6 lbs. of feed to make one pound of meat. Now, with additives and enriched feed, it takes half that amount.

After John started his turkey farm, 6 more sprang up between Kingston and No. Duxbury, causing Rte. 53 to be known as "Turkey Row." John was the first in the area to elevate the turkeys on "porches," a more sanitary method, since the droppings could fall to the ground. The turkeys got fewer diseases, the most prevalent being the black head disease, which could wipe out an entire flock in a matter of days.

The turkeys were kept in 20'x 20' rooms, with breeder houses and runs. John had a sign on top of the 200'x 200' structure, saying "New England's Largest Turkey Sun Porch." They raised about 11,000 turkeys a year, starting with the poults in March. They had a slaughterhouse, a sales room and huge freezers where the turkeys could be frozen for up to a year.

In 1955 John introduced the barbecued turkey, which became popular, even with Richard Nixon. It was 1957 when the Mayflower II was sailing to Plymouth from England. Nixon, then Vice President, was to be on hand for the ship's arrival and celebration. There was no expressway at the time, so the DeLorenzos knew Nixon would be traveling on Summer St. Anna and the kids sat outside, waiting, and were rewarded by a smile and wave from Nixon as he was driven past in a convertible, with his caravan of staff members. One of the neighbors was going to Plymouth for the ceremony, so John gave her a note to give to Nixon, inviting him to stop in for some barbecued turkey. John was surprised when the neighbor reported Nixon was on his way. Anna, frantic because she had no film in the camera, dashed off to the drug store for film.

years they hung in the shop -- "good advertising," says John. With the passing of time, the photo and Nixon's signature faded. John decided to send the letter back to Nixon when he was President, asking him to re-sign the letter. John began: "Now that you are President, I hope you are using better ink...."

John received the letter, re-signed, and the following note: "It was thoughtful of you to write as you did on Feb. 20. Your letter brought back memories of my Vice Presidential days -- and fond memories of delicious barbecued turkey as well. It is a pleasure to comply with your request regarding the letter which I sent to you on June 26, 1957 and it is returned to you with my very best wishes. Sincerely, Richard Nixon." The signatures on both letters have not faded.

John also introduced the first turkey roll in the area. He was at a turkey convention in Texas when he first tasted turkey roll. He came home and figured out how to bone a whole turkey and put it into a roll. He could make about 30 to 35 turkey rolls a day.

It was Christmas Day 1968. Anna had just gone to the shop to give a customer his ordered turkey. She returned to the kitchen and John asked, "Do you want to do this another year?"

"No."

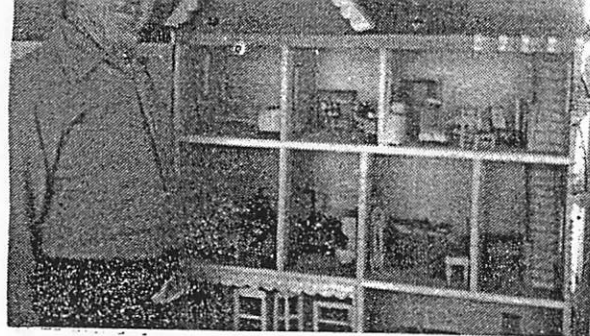
"Neither do I." And that was the end.

It had been a good life, "a lot of fun, a lot of work." Through the years they had raised Joe, an airline pilot, David, an engineer, Linda, a teacher, and Catherine, mother of 4, living in California. John had been in the Auxiliary Coast Guard during World War II, on the board of Fire Engineers, a charter member and president of Rotary. He had been written up in the magazine *Turkey World*, the cover of which showed John on top of his "turkey sun porch."

Their days now are a little less hectic, but they love to keep busy. John is planning a vineyard, as he makes his own wine. Anna hooks rugs and sews all her own clothes. They are planning Linda's wedding this summer and were examining the wedding dress which Anna wore 45 years ago, the dress Linda would like to wear.

There will be more pictures to add to their lifetime's scrapbook, one that is filled with mostly happy memories. The latest photos show John at a surprise 80th birthday party at his son Joe's house, where 72 friends and relatives gathered to wish him well. John watched 21 children line up and give him a "21-gun salute": each had a champagne bottle and one by one they popped the corks in an unforgettable tribute.

But besides the past, there is the future to contemplate. With John's youthful nature, his eager attitude toward life, who knows what project he'll be cooking up next? Whatever it is, it's bound to be successful.



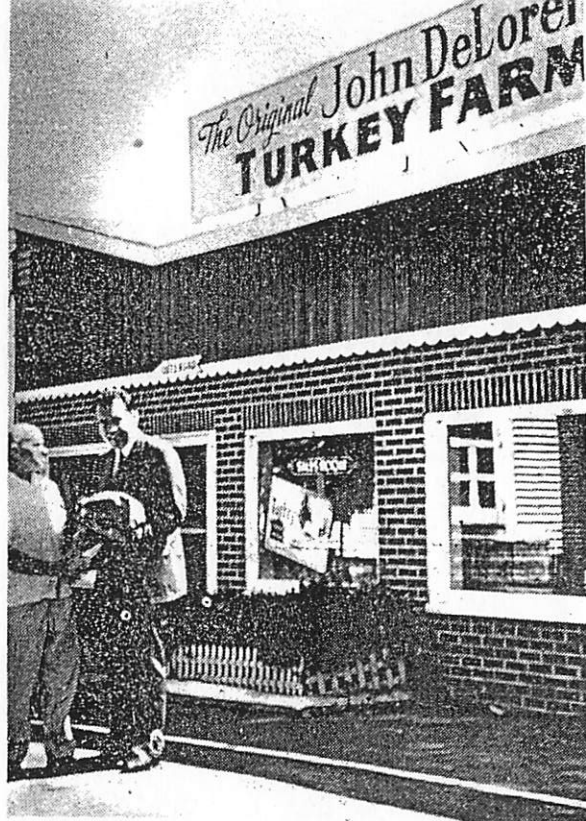
John DeLorenzo with the 12-room Victorian doll house he built.

He has carved a chess set, made a handsome clock of inlaid wood depicting Father Time; he has caned chairs and made plant stands. One of his prize creations is a 4-foot tall Victorian dollhouse, complete with all the furniture for its 12 rooms. The stairways have delicate spindles, there is a grandfather clock, a dining room table with a leaf, a spool bed, a piano, a corner hutch, upholstered chairs and sofas, a melodeon, chairs with fancy carved backs. Every room reflects the patience and care of delicate workmanship. He is a master with wood.

John was born in Italy (1/1/01)! and came to America with his 4 brothers and one sister in 1912, when his father started a fruit store in Quincy. John was 11 years old and had to enter the first grade because he couldn't speak English. Two years later, the family moved to the Summer St. house in Duxbury, John's home ever since.

In the 7th grade, John had to quit school to get a job. It was Nov. 11, 1918, Armistice Day, when John started assembling watches at the Waltham Watch Co. He didn't do much that first day, as everyone stood outside waving, shouting and tossing hats into the air. He thought, "This is going to be a great job." He stayed there 5 years, attending night school for 2 years. Then he entered Chauncy Hall, a prep school for MIT. From there he went to MIT, studying chemical engineering, and later transferred to Burdett College, where he earned a degree in business administration.

It was 1932 and jobs were scarce. After a fruitless search in New York City, he returned to Duxbury. Anna was living in Watertown then, and she and John were introduced through a neighbor who knew John's mother "in the old country." They were married in 1936.



John and Vice President Nixon in 1957 in front of the DeLorenzo's turkey farm.

Soon Nixon and his crew pulled in to the turkey farm. John insisted that a picture be taken of him with the Vice President, and Anna was not back yet. So Nixon instructed his secretary to take a picture. John handed out the barbequed turkeys to the staff, and they were off. Anna was still stuck in the traffic jam.

Shortly after, John received a letter which read: "My weekend engagements away from home are not too popular with Mrs. Nixon and my daughters, but I must say that I was more than forgiven when I arrived home last Saturday evening with your delicious barbequed turkey. My family and I are most appreciative of your kindness and we look forward most eagerly to a wonderful turkey dinner. With every good wish, Richard Nixon." Along with the letter was the photograph of John with Nixon, his arms holding the large packaged turkey.

John framed the letter and photo and for many